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C O N F I D E N T I A L ABUJA 000788

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [LI](#) [NI](#) [ECOWAS](#)

SUBJECT: ECOWAS: LEGAL DIRECTOR LALOUPPO GIVES A LIBERIA
UPDATE

REF: A. ABUJA 622

[1](#)B. MONROVIA 396 AND PREVIOUS

Classified by Ambassador Howard F. Jeter; Reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) PolMilOff and OIG Inspector Paul Tyson March 6 met ECOWAS Director of Legal Affairs Roger Laloupo. DAS Perry, accompanied by PolMilOff, also met Laloupo and his Deputy, Halima Ahmed, on March 7.

[1](#)2. (C) Laloupo said the ECOWAS-sponsored Liberia meeting was still set for March 14-16, but was not confirmed due to difficulty in contacting the various parties. Contrary to what Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf told us (Ref a), Laloupo remarked that the March meeting would be a preparatory session to allow the stakeholders to set a venue, date and agenda for the actual reconciliation meeting.

[1](#)3. (C) Laloupo confirmed ECOWAS Executive Secretary Chambas and Nigerian Minister of Integration and Cooperation in Africa Bimbola Ogunkelu had traveled to Monrovia to garner President Taylor's assent to the meeting. They later went to Dakar to elicit President Wade's approval. After a stop-over in Libya, the two traveled on to Addis Ababa for a meeting on NEPAD. (Laloupo added that the Secretariat had just faxed a list of possible meeting participants to Chambas in Addis for vetting.)

[1](#)4. (C) Laloupo lamented ECOWAS' inability to convince Liberia to accept its help in working towards national reconciliation and the restructuring of the Liberian armed forces after the end of the Liberian civil war. Since that effort had been unsuccessful, he sighed, problems that contributed to the war remained largely unresolved would have to be faced now, particularly with elections approaching.

[1](#)5. (C) Ahmed, who had visited Monrovia during the war and then again recently, opined that the country looked worse now. Unfortunately, she remarked, President Taylor could point to sanctions and the rebels and likely avoid culpability when election season rolled around. The only hope of a real election challenge to Taylor was if the opposition parties coalesced, though that seemed unlikely. When Ambassador Perry emphasized concern that many opposition figures feared returning to Liberia without security guarantees, Ahmed agreed, suggesting that ECOWAS might have to consider providing security to opposition politicians similar to that provided Hutu moderates in Burundi by the South African military.

[1](#)6. (C) DAS Perry joined Ambassador Jeter for a March 7 lunch with Alhaji Kromah, former leader of ULIMO-K, who also claims to have the loyalty of LURD fighters. On the issue of a fair electoral process, Kromah thought it possible only if Charles Taylor were not around. Kromah planned to attend the March 14-16 conference but expected nothing material to be achieved. He felt that the only solution was to continue to apply pressure on Taylor to leave office and the country. Kromah suggested that the way to get Taylor's attention and inspire greater political flexibility was to publicly make known the possibility that consideration might be given to bringing Taylor before the Sierra Leone Special Court for his role in the RUF-driven civil war.

[1](#)7. (C) COMMENT: Laloupo's characterization is the first we have heard that the meeting might be preparatory and not substantive. Laloupo admitted not having the latest details from Chambas, but is usually in the loop. It is possible that concerns raised by President Taylor and perhaps President Wade made ECOWAS to lower the bar for the Abuja meeting. Whether the meeting is preparatory or substantive, time is running out to prepare for the session and to invite the necessary participants. Many know of the session because of the hyperactive Liberian grapevine and will attend without

a formal invitation. However, if this meeting is a bust it may sap the momentum for a regionally inspired reconciliation process.

18. (U) DAS Perry cleared this message.
Jeter